NUMB. XXVIII.

The GUARDIAN.

Ætas Parentum pejor Avis tulit
Nos nequiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiorem. Hor.

Monday, April 13. 1713.

THeocritus, *Bion* and *Moschus* are the most famous amongst the *Greek* Writers of Pastorals. The two latter of these are judged to be far short of *Theocritus*, whom I shall speak of more largely, because he rivals the greatest of all Poets, *Virgil* himself. He hath the Advantage confessedly of the *Latin*, in coming before him, and writing in a Tongue more proper for Pastoral. The Softness of the *Dorick* Dialect, which this Poet is said to have improved beyond any who came before him, is what the Ancient *Roman* Writers owned their Language could not approach. But besides this Beauty, he seems to me to have had a Soul more softly and tenderly inclined to this way of Writing than *Virgil*; whose Genius led him naturally to Sublimity. It is true that the great *Roman*, by the Niceness of his Judgment, and great Command of himself, hath acquitted himself dexterously this way. But a penetrating Judge will find there the Seeds of that Fire which burned afterwards so bright in the *Georgicks*, and blazed out in the *Æneid*. I must not, however, dissemble that these bold Strokes appear chiefly in those Eclogues of *Virgil*, which ought not to be numbered amongst his Pastorals, which are indeed generally thought to be all of the Pastoral kind; but by the best Judges are only called his Select Poems, as the Word *Eclogue* originally means.

Those who will take the Pains to consult *Scaliger*'s Comparison of these two Poets, will find that *Theocritus* hath out-done him in those very Passages which the Critick hath produced in honour of *Virgil*. There is, in short, more Innocence, Simplicity, and whatever else hath been laid down as the distinguishing Marks of Pastoral, in the *Greek* than the *Roman*; and all Arguments from the Exactness, Propriety, Conciseness and Nobleness of *Virgil* may very well be turned against him. There is indeed sometimes a Grossness and Clownishness in *Theocritus*, which *Virgil*, who borrowed his greatest Beauties from him, hath avoided. I will however add, that *Virgil*, out of the Excellence of Genius only, hath come short of *Theocritus*; and had possibly excelled him, if in greater Subjects he had not been born to excel all Mankind.

The *Italians* were the first, amongst the Moderns, that fell into Pastoral Writing. It is observed, that the People of that Nation are very profound and abstruse

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